

News Transcript

Department of Defense Press Briefing by Major General Joseph Martin via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq Press Operations

Major General Joseph Martin, Commanding General, Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command-Operation Inherent Resolve; Captain Jeff Davis, Director, Defense Press Office
April 19, 2017

CAPTAIN JEFF DAVIS: Good morning.

And General, we want to make sure you can hear us and we can hear you.

MAJOR GENERAL JOSEPH MARTIN: I can hear you loud and clear.

CAPT. DAVIS: Thank you, sir.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're pleased to be joined today by Major General Joseph Martin. He is the commander of the Combined Joint Land Force Component for Operation Inherent Resolve.

General, we'll turn it over to you for opening comments, then we'll take questions from here.

GEN. MARTIN: Good morning. I'm Joe Martin, commander of the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command, which includes all the coalition ground forces in Iraq, and I also command the 1st Infantry Division out of Fort Riley, Kansas, which means I'm a Big Red One Soldier.

Due to the success of the Iraqi security forces, life is returning to normal in east Mosul. Over 250,000 boys and girls are now free to return to more than 320 schools that have been reopened by the government of Iraq. Over 76 Mosulawis has returned home, where the government of Iraq is working hard to improve the quality of life and reestablish essential services. Markets have reopened and work programs are in place.

Through coordinated efforts with the government of Iraq, the U.N. and along with humanitarian partners, Mosul's residents are on track to a sense of normalcy that existed prior to the brutal rule of ISIS in the city. The coalition will not abandon our commitment to the Iraqi partners because of ISIS's inhumane tactics of exploiting the population and destroying as much of Mosul as possible.

As I see it, the longer this fight goes on in west Mosul, the civilians will suffer at the hands of a brutal enemy. This is why ISIS must be defeated quickly. We know ISIS uses the tactic of taking civilians hostage for protecting while they're fighting from protected sites. ISIS has been indiscriminate in their use of VBIEDs and building IEDs to kill, maim and injure innocent civilians as part of their ongoing campaign of terror.

They've fired in excess of 7,000 mortars and rockets indiscriminately against the population of Mosul. What can be certain that the responsibility for the suffering of the Mosulawis lies directly with ISIS. The most effective way to protect civilians and prevent atrocities in the future is the defeat of ISIS and the establishment of security for the Iraqi people.

Regrettably, we're likely to see atrocities in the future, particularly as ISIS's situation becomes more desperate. However, we'll maintain focus on west Mosul and west Mosul will be liberated.

GEN. MARTIN: ISIS's capability and cohesion as an organization is weakening. It's under pressure all the way across Iraq. With ISIS's targeting of civilians trying to escape their brutal executions of Iraqis who want to be free of oppression, they showed that they were responsible for the suffering of Mosul.

The number of civilians murdered by ISIS on a weekly basis is in the hundreds with evidence showing that that's increasing. This is further proof that as their military position worsens so too does their inhumanity.

Let me remind everybody that the Iraqi Security Forces are winning in defeating ISIS and Mosul, and they've been doing so for over 18 months throughout Iraq.

They continue to make steady progress on multiple fronts and demonstrate their care for the civilian population every day.

They've already taken critical infrastructure, such as the international airport and government buildings.

And remember; only two short years ago ISIS was on the gates of Baghdad. Now, the Iraqi Security Forces are about to recapture Iraq's second largest city and ISIS is reeling from defeat after defeat across the country. Their leadership has fled and their days are numbered.

The Iraqi Security Forces have already liberated people in -- millions of people since 2014 and reclaimed tens of thousands of kilometers of terrain.

I fought against the Iraqis during the Gulf War. I've helped them train. And now we're supporting their fight as they defeat ISIS and liberate the rest of Iraq.

They continue to improve their capability and demonstrate a level of professionalism that makes me proud to serve with them. It's only a matter of time before they liberate the rest of Mosul and defeat ISIS in Iraq.

And with that, I'll be happy to take your questions.

CAPT. DAVIS: We'll start with Tara Copp of Stars and Stripes.

Q: Thank you, General.

I wanted to ask about the chemical attack that occurred on Saturday. Apparently, there were some U.S. forces in the area too. Were they also exposed? And could you give us any sort of update on what chemical you think was used?

GEN. MARTIN: I'm sorry; I didn't get your name. But thanks for the question.

Daesh has used chemicals in the vicinity of Mosul. The chemicals have had no impact on the Iraqi Security Forces. They had no impact on our forces.

And we're not certain at this time exactly what the agent is. We have sent -- (inaudible) -- back for testing. But we're still waiting for the outcomes of those tests, based on my understanding.

Q: Could you tell us how many people were exposed and sought treatment, and what sort of force protection measures, if any, are in place now?

GEN. MARTIN: Oh, I'm not going to get into the exact number of Iraqi Security Forces that were involved. But what I'll tell you is that they were all treated and they were all taken to the appropriate level of care to make sure that they were all right.

And all the forces that we have forward are there with the appropriate equipment. They've been trained on how to use that equipment. And they've been trained on help -- to help the Iraqis if the Iraqis ever run into another instance where Daesh decides to use chemicals.

Q: Can you provide any details on how the chemical agent was delivered? Was this via a drone or was this in a round?

GEN. MARTIN: We assess it was delivered by indirect fire.

CAPT. DAVIS: Next to Carlo Munoz of the Washington Times.

Q: Hey, sir. Thanks for doing this.

I kind of wanted to switch gears really quickly to Syria.

One, I was wondering if we can get an update on ongoing operations around Tabqa Dam and near Deir ez-Zor.

On the latter specifically, there's been some reports by Kurdish media that there was a second air assault operation that took place in the eastern suburbs of the city, targeting Daesh weapons and ammunition -- yeah, weapons and ammunition collection stashes. Could -- could you comment on both those operations?

GEN. MARTIN: (Inaudible) -- I regret I can't, because my focus is on Iraq. We're here to train, advise and assist the Iraqi Security Forces to defeat Daesh in Iraq. And that's our focus.

And so that would be a great question for the Combined Joint Task Force.

Q: Roger. Thanks.

CAPT. DAVIS: Next, to Thomas Watkins of Agence France-Presse.

Q: Hi, General. Thank you for doing this.

Just to go back to your opening remarks, you said the number of civilians being murdered by ISIS is in the hundreds each week. I'm sorry if I missed this, but are you talking specifically in -- in Western Mosul?

GEN. MARTIN: I'm sorry, I -- I couldn't understand your question. Could you ask again, please?

Q: Yes. In your opening remarks, you said that there were hundreds of civilians being murdered by ISIS each week. Was this in -- just in Western Mosul alone?

GEN. MARTIN: Well, for the past two years, the people of Mosul have been under the tyranny and oppression of Daesh. And Daesh has been exploiting the human population within the city of Mosul during that entire time.

And so East and Eastern Mosul -- they were held there. They were exploited there. But as they become more desperate, their tactics become more desperate and their inhumanity increases.

And so, what we're seeing in Western Mosul is the continued exploitation and expanded exploitation of the human element within the city. And so that's -- that's my concern and the principal reason I placed that in my statement.

Q: When you -- when you said you're helping Iraqi -- you said you're helping Iraqi Security Forces, and they're about to recapture Iraq's second city. What do you mean they're about to recapture it? When are they going to take Mosul?

GEN. MARTIN: Well, it's tough to tell. Just like the east side and -- it's -- the west side is very diversified urban terrain. We're talking about a place that's about half the size of Philadelphia, about 100,000 buildings, about 1,500 kilometers of roads that they've got to clear.

It's occupied by civilian population that's been under the control of Daesh. And with an enemy that will indiscriminately use the population for whatever reason they want. So, it makes it a tough fight.

And so it's tough to put a timeline on that fight. But what I can tell you is we see progress each and every day. And the Iraqi Security Forces worked our way through the complexity and the problems that are associated with this urban environment very well.

CAPT. DAVIS: Okay. Joe Tabet of Al Hurra?

Q: Thank you. General, could you -- as a commander on the -- as -- on the ground, and your -- based on your contacts with the Iraqi forces on a daily basis, how do you see the readiness of the Iraqi forces? And what do they need -- what kind of equipments do they need to finish the fight in Western -- in -- in the west of Mosul?

GEN. MARTIN: They have -- they have the equipment that they need. We help them in some regards with some of their supply, some of their equipment.

But they've got the equipment they need, they've got the momentum they need, and they've got the joint coalition fires that they need to continue the fight. And that's what they're making progress each and every day.

Q: Thank you.

CAPT. DAVIS: Next to Paul McLeary of Foreign Policy.

Q: General, with the fighting focused in Mosul, where else in Iraq do you see ISIS moving or existing in some strength?

I mean, I see airstrikes in Al Qa'im and other places. And where do you see the fight, kind of, moving next after West Mosul?

GEN. MARTIN: Paul, thanks for your question.

What I'll tell you is, we're going to go wherever the Iraqis need us to go. And we'll do the same thing we're doing in Mosul and that's -- that's supporting them so they can kill ISIS, they can liberate the people in that city.

There are several other cities that are still affected: Tal Afar, Balaj, Baaj, Al-Hadr, Hawija, and then down in the Euphrates River Valley, there's several cities along that river en route to Al Qa'im that still are under ISIS's control.

It's just a matter of time until the Iraqis continue to execute their campaign plan by design along a path that they will -- they will craft in the future. And as a partner force, we'll be there right by their side, as we are now, supporting them as they execute operations.

Q: And you see the post-Mosul operations as being more of a -- I guess a counterinsurgency fight with -- with smaller groups that are able to move around quickly -- more quickly and hide?

GEN. MARTIN: Paul, we don't know -- we don't know exactly when it'll go to a -- a -- an insurgency.

There's a lot of fighting to be done left in Iraq. There's a lot of work left to be done here. And the coalition understands that. The coalition's committed to that.

When the enemy decided to go to ground, is really something has yet to be determined. Until then, I'll tell you, we will prosecute this fight and continue to attack him wherever he's at, with the Iraqi Security Forces, with the same maneuver that you're seeing in western Mosul, the same maneuver that's been the key to success, enabled by joint and coalition fires over the past 18 -- 18 months to two years. That'll continue.

CAPT. DAVIS: Okay, Ben Kesling of the Wall Street Journal.

Q: General, quick question about the Iraqi forces.

The -- the CTS and the ERD have -- have been doing the -- the bulk of the hard fighting in the city. What's the current composition and disposition strength of those units? Have you seen a lot of attrition in those units? Is the morale down? Is it -- is it good?

And then after the Mosul fight, how long do you think it's going to take for -- for those units to reconstitute themselves to the strength that -- that they had before the beginning of Mosul operations?

GEN. MARTIN: Ben, that's a lot of questions. I'll see if I can tackle them one at a time.

So, as you -- as you well know, you've got -- within the city right now, you've got federal police, and side by side with them you've got -- you've got the CTS that are continuing to fight block to block through the city.

And out to the west, securing the western flank, clearing that urban terrain is the 9th Division.

The intentions of the Iraqi Security Forces beyond this point in time, I'm not going to -- I'm not going to talk about the specific details as to what they -- they have in mind. But what I can tell you is they're going -- they're going to maintain continuous pressure on the enemy there.

I'm not at liberty to talk about their numbers. That's a question you can ask them, but I don't think they'd really talk about it either.

They have the combat power they need to win this fight. They have the combat power they need to sustain this fight. Their commitment and steadfast will is something to admire as we watch it, considering everything that they've done over the past couple of years. And they understand how important this particular fight is; how important it is to liberate the second-largest city in Iraq; how important it is to continue to press the fight beyond that point.

And so they'll move at the pace, tempo that they see fit, based on what they see in front of them. And they've got the resources to do that.

Q: And then a quick follow-up for U.S. forces. Do you foresee a plus-up in the number of U.S. troops on the ground, especially as you start pushing into these other areas that are under ISIS control? And do you see an opening -- a reopening of old bases or opening of new bases for Americans in Iraq?

GEN. MARTIN: Ben, we've got the forces that we need now. If I need more forces, I would ask for them. You'll see a flexible application of basing operations as we continue to conduct operations here, just like we have since the very beginning of our operations. And so, we'll make sure once we understand exactly where the Iraqis want to go next, make sure that we're in a position that we can continue to provide them the steadfast support that we have since the beginning. And we'll continue to do in the future.

CAPT. DAVIS: Next to Travis Triton of the Washington Examiner.

Q: Hi. Thanks for doing this.

I'd seen some reports about U.S. special forces moving into Anbar province to liberate some of the areas out there. And I was wondering if you could confirm that and maybe talk a little about what's happening there?

GEN. MARTIN: If I got your name right, Travis, thanks for the question.

Travis, we've got -- we've got special forces. We've got conventional forces. We've got 23 nations that are in different locations across -- across Iraq conducting operations to enable Iraqi security force success. And we'll continue to do that.

As it pertains to specific locations or numbers, I'm not at liberty to really talk about that. But I'll tell you, we're everywhere. We're watching Daesh. We're getting after them.

CAPT. DAVIS: Ma'am. I'm sorry. I don't know your name.

(CROSSTALK)

Q: Thanks, General, for doing this.

Just back to the chemical attack over the weekend on an Iraqi military unit that had U.S. and Australian advisers attached to it. Could you just describe some more detail? Were the advisers with the Iraqi unit when the attack happened? Whereabouts was it in west Mosul? How far were they from a forward-operating base? And can you just let us know whether the partnered forces were treated for exposure because they were there when the attack happened? Or because they provided medical treatment to the Iraqi unit that was exposed?

GEN. MARTIN: Thank you for your question. And so our advisers are not attached to Iraqi security forces. They're with Iraqi security forces at various command and control locations throughout Iraq. And so being forward with those command and control facilities, they share the same risks the Iraqis so.

When exposed, if exposed to chemical munitions, we've got the technology. We have the force protection equipment. And we've got the training that all of our soldiers have done to protect themselves. And again, we have helped the Iraqis with that as well. And we continue to assist them so that they can -- they can be ready in case Daesh decides to use chemicals again in the future.

Q: Just a follow-up, General. In this specific attack over the weekend, were the partnered forces with the Iraqis outside of the operating base when the attack happened?

We're just getting confusing messages from the Australian Defense Department and the Pentagon about exactly where the foreign advisers were and what their role was, and what their -- what happened to them in terms of whether they were medically screened or they were doing a medical screening.

GEN. MARTIN: Yes. I'm -- unfortunately, I'm not going to get into the details of a specific -- a specific vignette as to what happened. What I'll tell you is that we're forward with the Iraqis each and every day. And with that, we share some risk with them.

But, we're ready for that risk. We understand the importance of that. And we understand the commitment it takes to -- to share that risk with the Iraqis, and we've got the equipment to protect ourselves in case we need to.

Q: Just one final question. Can you tell us -- give us a bit more detail about where the general area where it happened?

GEN. MARTIN: It was -- it was in West Mosul.

Q: A suburb? Be more specific and give a suburb?

GEN. MARTIN: I -- I don't have that information for you right now.

CAPT. DAVIS: Let's go to Ryan Browne from CNN.

Q: Hello, General. Thank you for doing this.

Just one quick follow-up on the chemical weapon. Is this a new -- is this a more sophisticated chemical agent than we've seen ISIS use before? I mean, there have been reported instances of a mustard agent used by ISIS in the past against Iraqi troops.

Is there any indication that this indirect fire was more sophisticated or more advanced than previous?

GEN. MARTIN: Okay, we're still testing. But the chemicals that they've used in the past are all low-grade chemicals because of their lack of production capability.

And so, we don't know what we'll find this time. But, in the past, it's been a low-grade capability.

Q: And -- and just on another quick -- how is the -- the back-clearing operation of -- of East Mosul and some of the liberated portions of West Mosul -- how's that going? Is -- are you seeing a lot of stay-behind fighters or any kind of attempt to kind of attack from the rear by ISIS -- you know, sleeper cells or anything like that in Mosul? Or is the back-clearing going fairly smoothly?

GEN. MARTIN: Ryan, the security and the -- the -- the back-clearing, as you call it, of East Mosul is going just fine. A couple of points on that.

There hasn't been an attack in East Mosul since 19 February when we began this operation on the west side over 58 days ago. The only thing that's happened there violently since then is the enemy firing hundreds, if not thousands, of rounds of indiscriminate indirect fires onto the east side of the city.

I've been through the east side of the city myself. And what I'll tell you is I've been doing this for 31 years, and it's the best post-liberated environment I've ever seen. And that's two months after post-liberation.

But remember, it's been scarred by the tyranny and oppression of Daesh for over two years. And so, it's going to take some time to recover from that.

And I'm -- I'm very impressed with what I see between the governor of Iraq, the U.N. and humanitarian partners who are coming together and combining their efforts to provide for the needs for the people of eastern Mosul.

The essential services that they -- that they have already put in place are impressive, and where they can't put in -- you know, fixed water through plumbing, they're -- they're delivering millions of gallons of water a day. And so we've got almost a quarter of a million kids back in school, in 320 schools.

And so they've made a marked amount of progress in, frankly, a very short amount of time, considering the fact that the east side of Mosul, since the -- or before the 24th of January, was under the control, tyranny and oppression of Daesh. And so it's pretty impressive -- with the progress we've seen.

CAPT. DAVIS: Next, to Lucas Tomlinson of Fox News.

Q: General, there were some reports that ISIS and al-Qaida are joining forces. Can you comment on that?

GEN. MARTIN: I have not heard that. I have not heard that.

Q: Got you. Also, now that the battle for Mosul has gone on past six months, is there any concern within the coalition that this thing is being dragged out longer than necessary?

GEN. MARTIN: I would -- I would tell you that I've got no concern with the progress we're seeing. And I think almost the contrary is true, considering that we -- when we looked at Mosul and its -- and its expanse, and its size, its scope, its complexity as we began this operation 183 days ago, I think it is -- pretty impressive -- pretty impressive progress to date.

Now, it's going to continue to be a tough fight. But everybody in this coalition gets it. We all understand the importance of commitment to this, and the Iraqis are -- are -- as our partners, are our example. We understand that a safer Iraq, a more stable Iraq means a more stable region, and a more stable region means we're safer back home.

And that's what drives us as we continue to work side by side with the Iraqis, here. So we're committed to this fight, we understand it's going to take time and we understand we got to be patient, particularly as a partner force. But there is steadfast and resolve in this coalition.

CAPT. DAVIS: Okay, next, to Jim Michaels, USA Today.

Q: General, could you describe a little bit about what's left of ISIS in west Mosul in terms of both numbers and capabilities?

GEN. MARTIN: Hey, Jim, good to talk to you and thanks for the question.

So, I would be -- that it's -- it's tough to put a number on how many -- how many ISIS are left in west Mosul. But what I can tell you is that the number is going down each and every day.

They're fighting tougher and tougher, and as I stated previously, their inhumanity continues to increase as they become more desperate. They're surrounded. There's foreign fighters -- there are some foreign fighters that remain. Foreign fighters have nowhere to go.

They can fight, surrender, or die. And the Iraqi Security Forces will prevail with them. For the -- for the -- other-than Muslawis that exist there, they're equally troubled, because they can't stand Mosul, because they have a different dialect.

And so we know this about the enemy that remains. The Iraqis know this about the enemy that remains. What's left is a tough fight through some very complicated terrain that will require a significant amount of tenacity and commitment. But I'm -- I assure you, the Iraqi security forces are up to that task. And I also assure you that we'll be there to advise, assist and enable them as they do it.

CAPT. DAVIS: Okay. Next to Kim Dozier of the Daily Beast.

Q: A bit of a follow up on that question in terms of the presence of ISIS in areas they still occupy. What do you estimate is their strength in an area like the Hawija Gap or in Tal Afar?

GEN. MARTIN: So, Kim, thank you for your question. It's tough to tell how many of those numbers remain, but both of those cities are currently occupied and controlled by ISIS. And so they're on the Iraqis' radar and they're on the path of liberation as well.

The numbers will continue to change over time. They just do in the way that this type of conflict -- the way this type of conflict goes. But the Iraqis will continue to execute their campaign plan and address both of those cities to make sure that we liberate them as well.

Q: Can I just ask a follow up? I had asked actually about the Hawija Gap. Forgive my ignorance. It's been a while since I've studied the map of Iraq. Is -- are you saying the town of Hawija is occupied but not the whole area -- that broad area between Kirkuk and the center of the country?

GEN. MARTIN: Right. I know exactly -- Kirkuk, yes. Right. Sharqat. So, they're in Hawija, and from time to time they act out and they try to draw the Iraqi security forces and the government of Iraq's attention away from their principal focus in the city that they in, in this case Mosul.

But they -- they will continue to stay there until someone comes and forces them out, hunts them down, and kills them. And the Iraqis are committed to doing that.

CAPT. DAVIS: Next, Richard Sisk with Military.com.

Q: General, in regard to the chemical attack again, did the -- did the U.S. troops, did the Australians put on their chemical gear? Did they don their MOPP gear?

GEN. MARTIN: Richard, thanks for your question. All of our -- all of our coalition mates have the chemical equipment that they need to be able to execute operations in a contaminated environment. And they've got the training they need to do that as well.

Q: At the time -- did that -- at the time did that actually happen?

GEN. MARTIN: But -- Richard, I'm not going to get into the details of any of the attacks that have happened. What I'll tell you is every single one of our teammates has the equipment they need and the training they need to -- (inaudible) -- that.

Q: General, did an alert go out when the attack went off for others possibly to be on guard, to put on the chem gear or have it nearby?

GEN. MARTIN: I don't know the answer to that question. But I would tell you that that would be more of a localized -- a localized type of attack.

Q: And, General, just one more. You know, you talked several times about the thousands and thousands of rockets, mortars that ISIS is firing indiscriminately.

Is that because of the large stockpile they already had? Or -- or are they still finding some way to get resupply? Do you see any signs of -- that they're running low on what they have?

GEN. MARTIN: Richard, they continue to fire every day. And I would attribute that to large stockpiles. Remember, they had two years to prepare for this particular part of the operation in Mosul. And they were well funded in the past.

Their supplies obviously continue to dwindle. I don't think they're being resupplied. But the supplies and the -- and the volume that you see is a function of the time that they had to prepare this particular defense in East and West Mosul.

CAPT. DAVIS: Okay, Courtney Kube, NBC News.

Q: Hi, General. Forgive me, because I missed the top of the briefing. But I just want to make sure I understand the details that you're willing to disclose about this chemical attack.

So, you -- you are acknowledging that U.S. and Australian advisers were with the Iraqis at the time of the attack and were exposed to some sort of a low-grade chemical. Is that correct?

GEN. MARTIN: Courtney, I'm not going to talk about the details of this particular event. I'll tell you that the -- the enemy has used chemicals here.

We're forward with the Iraqis. We share the risk with them. And we -- we have -- we have the appropriate protective equipment and we have the training to use that protective equipment.

That's what I'll tell you.

Q: And forgive me, because I -- I just -- I don't want to mischaracterize what you're -- what you're willing to say here. But you're acknowledging that there were advisers who were with this Iraqi Security Force unit at the time that they were hit by indirect fire that had some low-grade chemical in it, right?

Are you -- you're -- you're saying that? Are you not acknowledging that?

GEN. MARTIN: No. Courtney, that's -- that's what you're saying. What -- what I'm saying is, is that we have advisers forward with the Iraqis. They share the same risk with the Iraqis as they're -- as they're forward.

And they're protected from the chemical equipment. And they're protected -- they have the appropriate equipment, and they can do the training -- and they've done the training to prepare with that equipment.

Q: Ask it this way then, General. There's been a lot of media reporting that there were Australian and American advisers with these Iraqis when they came under an attack that had some chemical component to it. Is that reporting wrong?

GEN. MARTIN: Courtney, we're forward with the Iraqis. We share the same risks they do. This is a complicated, risky environment with an enemy that absolutely has no limitations on their inhumanity.

And so, with that risk, there's danger. But our soldiers are prepared with the appropriate equipment and they have the training necessary to defend against that.

CAPT. DAVIS: Okay. And Tara Copp for a follow-up.

Q: To follow on Courtney's line of questioning, I'm not quite sure what the reluctance is about discussing this chemical attack. In previous chemical attacks, such as when U.S. help -- forces helped render aid to some Iraqi forces that had picked up an element that might have chemicals on it, the DOD was very forthcoming on the potential exposure.

Are you saying that no U.S. forces and no Australian forces were either exposed -- and that's why you're not talking about it? It was Iraqi exposure only?

GEN. MARTIN: We have not confirmed exposure at this time.

Q: Iraqi or U.S. or Australian forces?

GEN. MARTIN: We've already talked about Iraqi forces. (Off mic)

CAPT. DAVIS: I'm sorry, sir, we lost your audio. Could you repeat that last couple of sentences?

GEN. MARTIN: Yes. The Iraqi security forces, as I said earlier, were in the vicinity of one of the strikes. They were taken back to the appropriate level of medical care. And they have -- no one's been impacted and nobody's died. And the good news is, is that nobody's -- nobody's been impacted significantly by this.

Q: Thank you.

CAPT. DAVIS: Okay, last call. Anybody -- yes, sir, what's your name?

Q: Mark Irons, EWTN News Nightly.

General, I want to change directions, here. The Christian population in Iraq has been annihilated by ISIS. Their ancient cities have been destroyed by ISIS, and hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled the country. What will the U.S. do to help these Christians rebuild after this fight is won?

GEN. MARTIN: So, I'm sorry, I didn't get your name, but thanks for your question.

We're here as 23 nations to advice and enable and assist the Iraqi Security Forces to defeat Daesh. And that's what we're going to continue to do.

CAPT. DAVIS: And Lucas Tomlinson.

Q: Just one more, General.

A few minutes ago, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said from Riyadh, when you have -- when there's trouble in the region, you find Iran. My question to you, General, is, is that the case in Iraq? Whenever there's trouble, you see Iran?

GEN. MARTIN: So, what we see is, we see an enemy that has been here for two years, tyrannically ruling over the people in several locations throughout Iraq, and it's ISIS who's the enemy. And that's what we're focused on. And so we'll continue to train, equip and advise Iraqi security forces so they can defeat ISIS. That's our focus.

CAPT. DAVIS: Okay. And with that, sir, are there any final comments for us before we sign off?

GEN. MARTIN: Well, I thank you all for your time.

I will tell you we're going to continue to move forward with our mission here to defeat ISIS. We're building partner capacity each day, and our partners are committed to this fight, and we're committed to them. And so we'll continue to do that. Thank you very much.

CAPT. DAVIS: (inaudible) -- General.

Thank you, everybody.